

# Air quality *and* health in your home

*Home is the one place you expect to be able to breathe easy. Yet even new homes can be filled with hidden dangers to your family's health and well being.*

**P**oor indoor air quality is sometimes blamed on energy efficiency measures—measures designed to tighten buildings, reduce the leakage of air, and decrease the amount of energy needed to heat or cool. Even “leaky” buildings, however, can suffer from unhealthy air when the sources of pollution are inside.

The good news is, you can protect your family from invisible contaminants without giving up the energy efficiency of your home.

## **What causes indoor air pollution?**

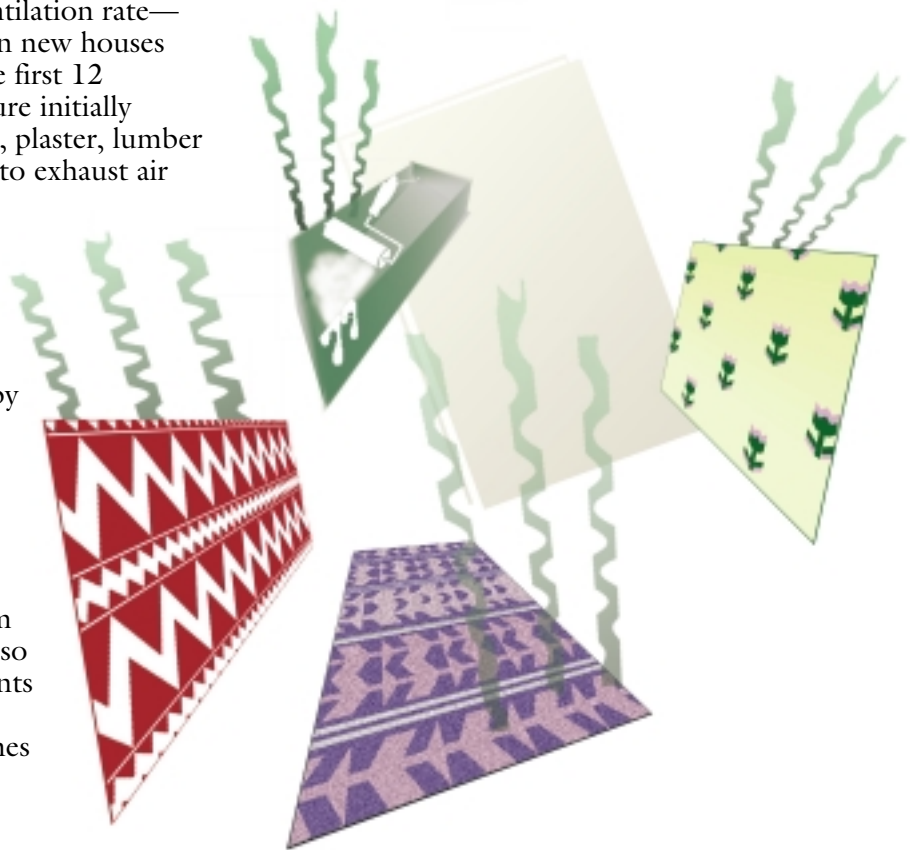
Indoor air pollution—gasses or particles released into your home's air—is often the unintended byproduct of manufactured items such as chemically treated building materials, foam insulation, carpeting, particle board furniture, aerosol sprays, paints and paint thinners, cleaning products and insect sprays. Pollutants may also be organic—such as molds and mildews.

These dangers to your family's health are hidden throughout your house, but they can be avoided by taking a few precautions, like increasing ventilation and letting sunlight and fresh air into your home.

## **Preventative measures**

Studies suggest that the ventilation rate—bringing outdoor air inside—in new houses should be increased during the first 12 months to help dry out moisture initially contained in concrete, drywall, plaster, lumber and other materials, as well as to exhaust air pollutants.

Most home heating and cooling systems, including forced air heating systems, do not bring fresh air into the house. You can, however, increase your ventilation rate by opening your windows and doors, when the weather permits, to allow for cross ventilation throughout your home. Even keeping one window open just an inch will increase ventilation. Bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans are also good for removing contaminants directly from the source. And don't forget to vent your clothes dryer to the outdoors.



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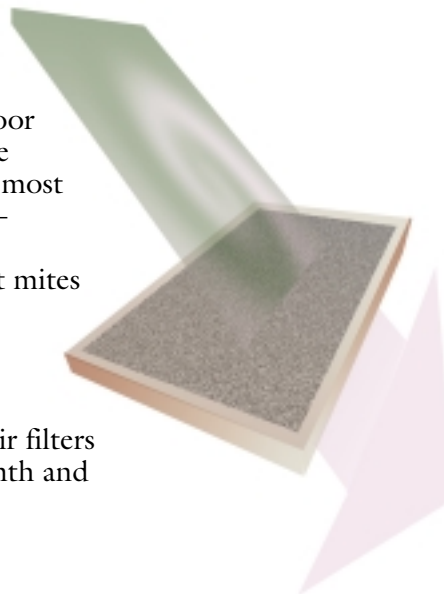


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**T**he most effective way to deal with indoor pollution is to reduce its source. While you probably can't eliminate all of the most common air pollutants in your home—cooking and cleaning odors, and biological contaminants like viruses, animal dander, dust mites and pollen—you can effectively reduce your exposure to them.

One of the simplest methods for reducing allergens is to keep your home as clean as possible. In addition, you should check the air filters in your furnace and air conditioner every month and replace them when they're dirty.



## Household hazards

Be wary of products that give off fumes such as sprays and cleaners, paints or hobby products. Make sure you have adequate ventilation when you use them, and keep volatile substances like gasoline, lighter fluids, barbecue charcoal starters and other combustible products in a well-ventilated area, preferably in a storage area outside your home.

Store household cleaners and toxic substances well away from children, and be careful not to mix certain household chemicals together. When combined, chlorine bleaches, drain cleaners, and common household cleansers can let off noxious fumes that can sometimes be fatal.



## Be aware

Indoor pollution affects people in different ways. In some it can cause health problems such as headaches, nausea, asthma, allergy attacks or frequent eye, nose, and throat irritations. At its most extreme, it can be deadly.

Be conscious of indoor air pollution sources. Where possible, choose products that will not contribute to it, and take precautions to eliminate it.

Energy efficiency and good indoor air quality can go hand in hand. Through careful planning, good ventilation, and following a few basic principles, you really can breathe easier. At the same time, you can be safer, healthier and still use less energy.

